

Chasing Ice

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Film Annotation #3

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575 Words

Title, director and release year?

Chasing Ice is a documentary film directed by Jeff Orlowski and released in December of 2012.

What is the central argument or narrative of the film?

The film centers itself on the work of photographer James Balog, a nature photographer, and his time-lapse photography of glacial melt and retreat. The argument of the film is that glaciers are receding at massive rates which has obvious effects on ocean levels. What makes _Chasing Ice_ unique is that Balog's premise is that if the general public had accurate imagery to accompany environmental news, then they would take the issues more seriously.

How is the argument or narrative made and sustained? (Use concrete examples from the film to illustrate.)

The film is powerful because the central argument is made by cutaway interviews, data visualizations of environmental figures, and photography and cinematography of the changing landscape. The first part of the film features cutaways with glaciologists and natural scientists from prominent universities, publications and organizations, along with accompanying data visualizations, to make the case that glacial melt is an issue. The last portion of the film shows Balog's presentations of his time-lapse photography that the first part of the film shows him obtaining, which is the more emotional portion of his case.

What sustainability issues did you spot? Identify and explain each. (Examples - Political, Legal, Economic, Technological, Media, Organizational, Educational, Behavioral, Cultural, Ecological)

The most prominently featured sustainability issues are ecological, such as glacial melt, retreat, calving, and greenhouse gases causing these things. The film also touches on the cultural and behavioral components of these issues, depicting talking heads on news networks denying climate change, the cultural issue, and imploring people to wake up and make different choices, the behavioral component.

What parts of the film did you find most persuasive and/or compelling?

I found the most compelling part of the film to be, by far, the time-lapse photography that Balog works to obtain. It is absolutely stunning visually and is also incredibly communicative about what is actually taking place in these parts of the world that many people don't know about.

Does the film have emotional appeal to you? Why? (Use concrete examples from the film to illustrate.)

The film is pretty overt in its emotional appeal to viewers, and it was effective with me personally. The time-lapse photography is accompanied by quiet but forceful piano music that gives Balog's presentations of his work an air of seriousness and reputability.

Does the film rely more on science or emotion? (How does the film balance the scientific augment and the emotional argument?)

I think that what is unique about this film is that it is emotional in its reporting of scientific data. What is emotional about the film is seeing the visual evidence of scientific data. The film does delineate between the first part which is primarily focused on stating data and the second portion which is concerned with showing it in the real world.

Does the film want you to do something? If the film does suggest action, do you think it is a good idea? Will the suggested action help?

The main call to action of the film is to take the issues of climate change seriously and stop pretending that it's not happening. Balog makes the comparison between evolution-deniers and moon-landing-deniers, to say that we need to stop treating it as one of these issues. I think this is a good call to action because unfortunately popular culture doesn't see these issues as the grave matters of life and death that they are.

Are there other actions that are not suggested that should be taken?

There are lots of other actions that could be taken that may not be particularly suitable for a film like this. Policy changes, consumption habit changes, and activism are all effective suggestions but I viewed the primary purpose of this film to be evidential not instructional. It is simply showing an issue in a way that we've never seen it. Not suggesting specific actions makes it more durable over time.

What was the target audience for this film? Why?

I think the target audience of this film is popular culture. The film is incredibly approachable and the time-lapse photography appeals to anyone, with any knowledge of glaciology and ecology.